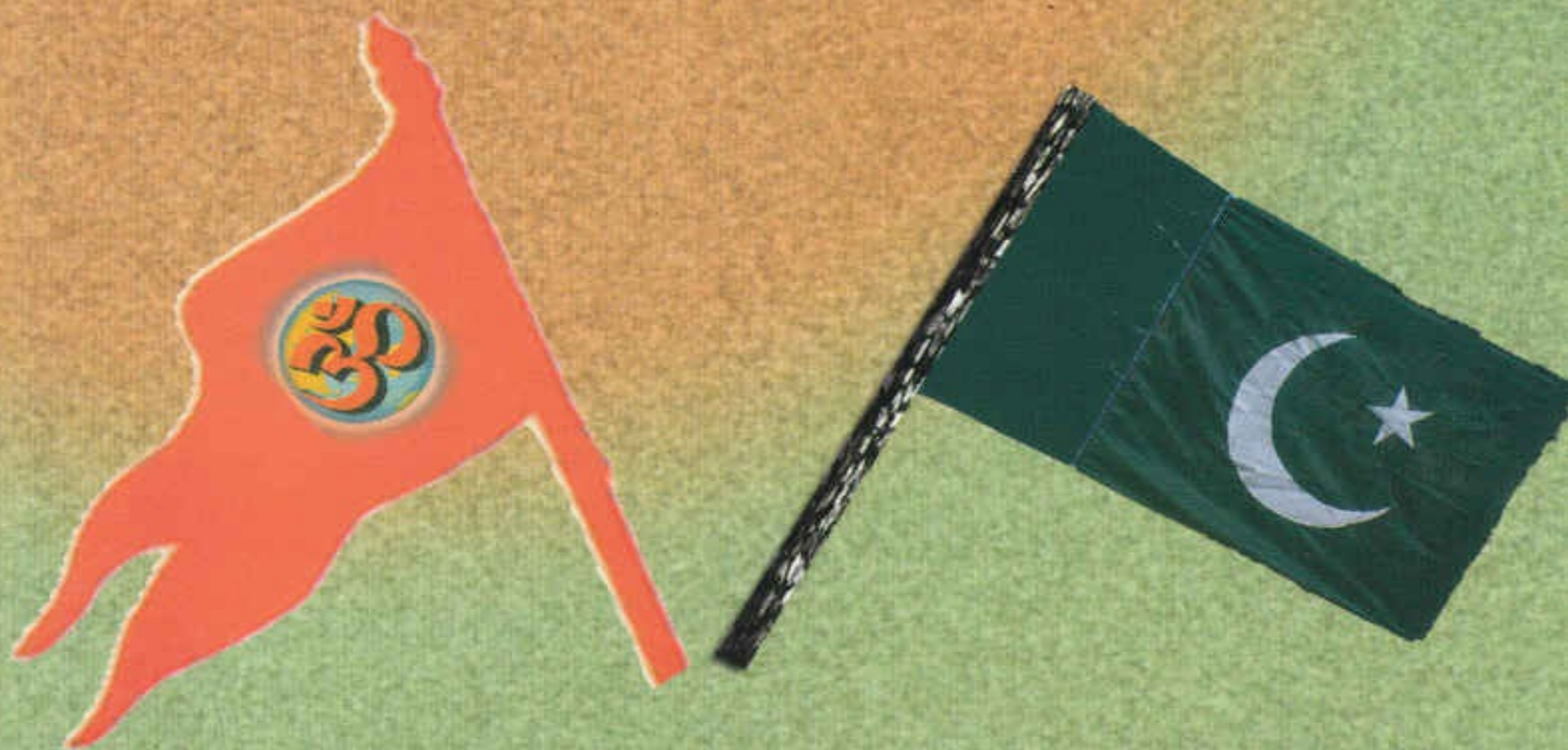


# Hinduism & Islam

the common thread



**Sri Sri Ravishankar**

HINDUISM & ISLAM

The Common Thread

By Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

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## Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is a renowned spiritual leader and global humanitarian whose mission of uniting the world into a violence-free, stress-free global family has inspired millions of people to broaden their share of responsibility and serve society.

Sri Sri has devised practical tools and techniques that help individuals achieve calmness of mind and clarity of thought. Such a state of mind empowers individuals not only to achieve their goals, but it also instills a sense of service and greater connectedness with humanity.

In 1981, Sri Sri established the Art of Living Foundation, an educational organization with a presence in more than 150 countries. The Foundation's self-development programs offer powerful tools to eliminate stress and foster a sense of well-being.

In 1997, Sri Sri founded the International Association for Human Values (IAHV), a humanitarian organization, which advances human values such as compassion, caring, and commitment in political, economic, and social spheres.

IAHV and the Art of Living Foundation collaborate on humanitarian initiatives, which include conflict resolution, disaster and trauma relief, environmental conservation, prisoner rehabilitation, youth leadership, women's empowerment, campaigns against female foeticide and child labor, and supporting education for all.

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## Hinduism & Islam

Dedicated to the people of Pakistan  
who have forgotten their own roots

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

## Preface

“We have no objection to taking food from every part of the world and listening to music from every part of the world. When it comes to going to a doctor, we want the best doctor, regardless of race or nationality; we want the best teachers, drivers, cooks.... Why can't we take the best from every religion and make it our own? We need to globalize wisdom too!”

*Sri Sri Ravi Shankar*

In his unceasing effort to bring different communities and cultures together, Sri Sri (as he is lovingly called) has given a series of talks shedding light on various aspects of religious practice, helping us to find a large number of commonalities hitherto unexplored.

Today Hindus are accused of meaningless rituals and practices of innumerable gods and goddesses, while Islam bears the brand of fanaticism and intolerance. This book aims to open up the minds of people to share common good.

## Acknowledgements

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## Hinduism and Islam

Hinduism and Islam appear to be completely opposing religions. The way of life, the modes of worship, the food habits, what is holy and sacred for each of them is very different. These visible differences have created more misunderstanding about the basics of both religions creating a wider gap. The apparent differences are so great that there is very little attempt by each community to enquire into the others' philosophy and practices. While the Muslims are considered as *Mlechha* (unholy) by the Hindus, the Hindus are considered *Kafirs* (infidels) by the Muslims. Whereas the Koran condemns the idolaters to hell and gives permission to kill the infidels, the Hindus are sitting and waiting for the *Kalki avatar* to redeem the world from *Mlechha*.

Amidst such hostile theological warfare, are there any values and practices that are common to both these great religions? In this book we will look at pre-Islamic conditions and some amazing facts that unite these two religions.

### Faith in One God

Hinduism is often perceived to be a religion of many gods. Contrary to this perception, it believes in only one God. It professes *Advaita*—the non-dual monotheism. Though there are 7 colors in a rainbow, it all comes from one white light. Similarly all the 33 crore *devi devatas* (gods and goddesses) are nothing but the rays of one *Paramatma* (Supreme Being/Intelligence). One God is given 108 names or sometimes 108 names, *Sahasranama*.

The *Bhagavad Gita* says *Eko devah sarva Hutanataratma*—meaning, one God who dwells in everybody.

The *Upanishad* says *Ekam sad viprah bahudha vadanti*—meaning, only one God, adored in many names and forms.

Islam believes in one God who is vast and formless, and He is addressed by 99 other names.



### Condemning Worship of Other Gods\*

*\*This is one of the most misunderstood phrases. When we divide God in Muslim God and Hindu God, differences arise. There is no such God who takes care of only Muslims or only Hindus. This is what is meant by "Other God." When you say Other God, you are restricting the domain of God. God has to be one without the second. He is the Father and the Lord of the whole universe and all people. A concept of Other God only causes fear.*

The Bhagavad Gita says, "Those who worship other gods are of inert intellect; for the benefit they derive in worshipping other gods is very small."

*Dvityadvai bhayam bhavati* which means, Fear is the result of duality.

*Pujo aur na deva:* Do not worship other gods.

Islam prohibits worshipping of other gods.

### The Mode of Worship

The Hindus believe that God is formless and He is adored in every form. Before worshipping God in an idol, Hindus pray, "Oh, my God, who is present everywhere and in my heart, for some time please come and be in this idol, so that I can express my feelings and play with you."

And at the end of puja they say, *Hritpadma karnika madhye shivena saha sundari pravishadvam mahadevi sarvai avarnai saha*, which means, "O beautiful and all-pervading One, please come back to the lotus of my heart in all your glory."

Then they go and immerse the idols in the water. The picture of a person is not the person or the visiting card of a person is not the person. Similarly, the idols are a symbol of the *Chaitanya*, the consciousness or the divinity.

Love and life are unmanifest in nature, but they manifest through the physical form. Similarly the unmanifest divinity is what is worshipped through the five elements—earth, water, fire, air, and ether.

Islam strictly adheres to the formless (*nirakar*), it has nevertheless, recognized the importance of the form and the symbol, which is the

Kaaba of Mecca. Though God is all-pervading, facing the Kaaba and honoring it is worshipping the Formless through the Form (*Sagun Sakar*).

Offerings like *Chaddar* at the *Dargah* is also a common traditional practice in Hindus, like offering *Chunni* to the Mother Divine in the temple.

### Namaskaram—Namaaz

*Namaaz* (Islamic prayer ritual) comes from two Sanskrit words: *Nama* (to worship) and *Yaja* (to unite with God). *Vajrasana* (a yogic posture) is an essential part of the *Namaaz*.

### Direction of Prayer

Hindus pray facing the East in the morning and West in the evening. The Hindus also face West because the deities face the East.

The Muslims offer prayers facing the direction of the *Kaaba* (Mecca).

The water in the East in the Mosque, and washing of hands and feet before going for prayer, are common to Muslims and Hindus. These were customs taken from the Vedic practices prevalent in Arabia at that time. They are not in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

### Time of Prayer and Holy Days

The Hindus perform early morning, noon, and sunset prayers as prescribed in the Vedas called the *Sandhya vandanam* and five times a day—pre-dawn, morning, noon, evening, and night—*Pujas* are performed in the temples.

The Muslims perform *Namaaz* five times daily as prescribed in the Koran.

Friday, which is the holiest day for the Muslims, is also the holy day for Hindus for worship of the Mother Divine. The *Rahukul Puja* or the noon *Puja* on Friday is considered very auspicious for Hindus as well.

The 30 days of prayer and fasting of the Muslims are akin to the *Mandala puja* of the Hindus.

The name of the Islamic month of *Ramadan* comes from the

Sanskrit word *Rama-dhyan*. *Dhyan* means to meditate and *Ram* in Sanskrit means “the one who shines in the heart.”

Thus *Ramadan* refers to a time to meditate on God. Fasts are also associated with Vedic worship, and Islam also enjoins fasting and praying tradition for *Ramadan*.

### Haj and Teerth Yatra

Shaving the head and wearing unstitched white clothes for *Haj* is similar to the Vedic tradition of *Yagya* and *Teerthyatra*. This again is not in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

No living creature is allowed to be killed in Mecca during pilgrimage. This is similar to the Vedic traditions.

### Lunar Calendar

The months of the Hindu Lunar calendar are unlike the Judeo-Christian calendar, which does not subscribe to the position of the sun and moon. Except in the Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Punjab regions of India, which follow the solar calendar, the rest of the Hindus throughout India follow the lunar calendar.

The Islam calendar is also a lunar calendar akin to the Hindu lunar calendar.

The Muslim month of *Safar* signifies an extras month, identical to the *Adhik Masa* or the extra month of the Vedic calendar.

The name of the Islamic month of *Rabi* is derived from the Vedic word *Ravi* (because the Sanskrit letter “V” changes into the Prakrit “B”). One festival that occurs in this special month is the *Gyarahavi Shareef*, which is the eleventh day of the month, when a special *Manavrati* initiation ceremony used to be held. In the Vedic tradition, the 11<sup>th</sup> day after the new or full moon is the sacred *Ekadashi* day. This is a custom that is still commemorated in the Muslim *Gyarahavi Shareef*. The Muslim observance of *Milad-un-Nabi* is also the same as the Vedic celebration of the vernal equinox, which signifies a reunion with God. There are other Muslim festivals which are also dependent on the sighting of the moon, which is similar to the Vedic tradition.

### Moon and Star

In the Hindu tradition the moon and stars are revered. The sun was also revered, as it was a source of comfort in the icy Himalayas.

In the Arabian desert, it was the moon and stars which gave comfort while the harsh sun was hostile. Hence in Islam, the moon and the stars were chosen as the symbols of serenity and divinity.

Shiva is known as *Chandrashekhara*—One who has the crescent moon for a crown.

### Flag

In India the saffron color was what would stand out in the greenery, so that was chosen as the main color for the flag. The Jains, in the Rajasthan desert, took to the five-colored flag which was the most visible in those geographical conditions.

In the Arabian desert, the green flag was very appropriate, as it could be sighted from a distance.

### Why Islam Banned Music

To reach the depths of the Being (during prayer and fasting), one needs to go beyond sound. Mohammed went up to the cave to find that quietness and meditate, and Islam therefore discourages all music that is not congenial to spiritual practices.

The Gita also says, *Shabdadeen vishayan anyan sarvan tyaktva asheshataha* which means, renounce all the sounds in order to become a yogi.

*Jigyasurapi yogasya shabda brahmata vartate* which means—one who is inquisitive of union with God goes beyond the sound.

### Funerals: Burial or Cremation

The Vedic rishis found cremation best even ecologically, though the freedom to bury is also professed in the Hindu thought.

In the desert there was no option other than burying the dead, as there was no wood available. The hot sand bed of the desert would do the

job of cremation.

### Gabriel and Gauri

The Islamic archangel Gabriel sounds similar to the Hindu Goddess Gauri. By the grace of Gauri, one can have knowledge and understanding of the Divine. Gabriel had an important role in the revelations which Mohammed had.

### Incense & Attar, Chanda & Dhoop

While incense and *attar* are part of the Islamic tradition, *chandan* and *dhoop* are part of the Hindu tradition. This is not found in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

### Brahma—Abraham, Saraswati—Sara

In the Hindu tradition the first preceptor is Brahma and his wife is Saraswati.

The founder of Kaaba in Islam is known as Ibrahim and his wife is Sara.

### Burkha

In those days the *burkha* was introduced to protect women and not punish women. Hindus also say women need to be protected and honored at the same time.

### The Path

The Sufi process of spiritual development is broken into stages, of which the first is the practice of asceticism and detachment from worldly affairs of the body and bodily possessions. Silent meditation is an important practice.

The second stage is studying with a bona fide teacher to acquire esoteric knowledge. The worship usually consists of chanting of 99 names of Allah on the 99 beads of the rosary.

The third stage consists of attaining enlightenment of the experience of love between God and man, which leads to ecstasy. This is

very similar to the element of *bhakti* found in *Vaishnavism*, the Vedic worship of Vishnu.

In the Koran, as well as the Bhagavad Gita, the path of surrender is emphasized.

#### Rosary—Masbah & Japamala

The Hindus have a practice of chanting mantras on the beads of the *japamala*.

The Muslims too chant the 99 names of Allah on the 99 beads of their rosary.

#### Mecca

Mecca was also a holy place for the Hindus. The ancient Vedic scripture *Harihareshwar Mahatmya* mentions that Lord Vishnu's footprints are consecrated at Mecca.

*Ekam Padam Gayayantu, Makkayantu Dwitiyakam, Tritiyam Sthapitam Divyam, Muktyai Shuklasya Sannidhau*

The allusion is to the *Vamana* incarnation of Lord Vishnu whose lotus feet were consecrated at three holy sites, namely Gaya, Mecca, and Shukla Teertha.

The names of the holiest Muslim cities Mecca and Medina come from the Sanskrit word *Makha-Medini* which means "The Land of Fire-Worship." Even the most ancient names of these two places were *Mahcorava*—which came from *Mahadeva* (Lord Shiva) and *Yathrabn*—which came from *Yatra-Sthan* (place of pilgrimage).

#### The Shivalinga and the Kaaba

Though Islam prohibits idol worship, Muslims revere the black stone in Kaaba which is held sacred and holy.

The black stone in the Kaaba is called *Hajre Aswad* from the Sanskrit word *Sanghey Ashweta* (non-white stone). The Shivalinga is also called *Sanghey Ashweta*.

The pedestal *Maqam-E-Ibrahim* in the center of the Kaaba is octagonal in shape.



In Hinduism the pedestal of Brahma the creator is also octagonal in shape.

The name Kaaba comes from the Sanskrit word *Garbha Graha* shortened to *Gabha* which refers to the *Sanctum Sanctorum*.

Kaaba is also known as *Haram* which comes from the Sanskrit word *Hariyam*, which means “The Shrine of Hari.”

Just as in Hinduism, the custom of circumambulating (*Pradakshina*) the Deity is practiced at the Kaaba also. The pilgrims circumambulate the entire building (Kaaba) seven times in the counter-clockwise direction.

Another holy tradition at the Kaaba is that just as every Shiva temple has a sacred water spring that represents the holy river *Ganga* (Ganges), there is the *Zam Zam* spring near the Kaaba.

### Murti Puja

Often people think Hinduism is only idol worship. This is not so. The Vedantic school of thought also condemns idol worship. There are several verses in Hinduism, stating that idol worship is only for the beginner. It is not the idol that is really worshipped. It is used as a symbol for the unmanifest, *nirgun* Brahman.

To the question, “Where is God,” the rishis replied:

*Manushyanam apsu devata*—To a human, love is God.

*Manishinam divi devata*—For the intellectual, wisdom is God.

*Balanam loshtha kashteshu*—The uneducated and thick-minded, they see God in idols.

*Gynanino atmani devata*—For the enlightened, God is one’s own Self.

The Muslim tradition says that in 600 A.D., people worshipped anything and had lost the true concept of religion. When Mohammed conquered Mecca, he ordered the removal of all images except a few. Mohammed did this to promote awareness of the subtle, unmanifest nature of divinity. Thus Mohammed I given the credit for stopping the practice of all false worship of fabricated idols.

### Aum and Ameen

The sound of Aum and Ameen are very similar. While Om is chanted in the Hindu rituals and prayers, Ameen is chanted in the Muslim rituals.

If the Sanskrit symbol for Aum is read backwards, magically the number 786 will appear. The number 786 is a divine and lucky number for Muslims, as it is the numeric equivalent of the first words in the Koran —“In the name of God, the most compassionate and merciful.”

### Shariyat and Smritis

In the Vedic period there are *shrutis* and *smritis*. *Shrutis* are the basic truths of life, whereas *smritis* are those derived according to time and place, like *Manu Smriti*, *Yagyavalkya Smriti*, etc.

*Shariyat* gives codes of conduct etc. and is similar to the *smritis*.

Hindus are of the belief that *smritis* should be varied and adopted according to place and time.

### Other Commonalities

Polygamy was common in both the religion.

Peacock feathers are used by both Sufis and Hindus.

Like Hindus have *yantras* and mantras, *taveez* and chanting is also common in Asian Muslims.

## The Pre-Islamic Vedic Connection

The following poem glorifying the Vedas was written by Labi-Bin-E-Akhab-Bin-E-Turfa who lived in Arabia around 1850 B.C. That was 2300 years before Mohammed.

This verse can be found in *Sair-Ul-Okul* which is an anthology of ancient Arabic poetry. It was compiled in 1742 A.D. by the order of the Turkish Sultan, Salim.

*Aya muvwarekal araj yushaiya noha*  
*Minar Hind-e*  
*Wa aradakallaha*  
*Manyonaifail jikaratun*

Oh the divine land of Hind (India)  
(How) very blessed art thou!  
Because thou art the chosen  
Of God blessed with knowledge

*Wahalatijali Yatun ainana sahabi*  
*Akha-atunjikra Wahajayhi yonajjalur*  
*-rasu minal Hindatun*

The celestial knowledge which like  
Four lighthouses shone in such  
Brilliance—through the (utterance of)  
Indian sages in four-fold abundance

*Yakuloonallaha ya ahal arafalameen kullahum*  
*Fattabe-u jikaratul Veda bukkun*  
*Malam yonajjaylatun*

God enjoins on all humans  
Follow with hands down  
The path the Vedas with his divine  
Precept lay down

*Wahowa alamus Sama wal Yajur*  
*Minallahay Tonajeelan*  
*Fa-e-noma ya akhigo mutiabay-an*  
*Yobassheriyona jatun*

Bursting with (Divine) knowledge  
Are Sama & Yajur bestowed on creation  
Hence brothers respect and  
Follow the Vedas, guides to salvation

*Wa-isa nain huma Rig Athar nasayhin*  
*Ka-a-Khuwatun*  
*Wa asant Ala-udan wadowa masha-e-ratun*

Two others, the Rig and Athar, teach us  
Fraternity, sheltering under their  
Luster dispels darkness till eternity

Another poem found in the Sair-Ul-Okul and written by Jirrham Bintoni is in the praise of India's great King Vikramaditya who had lived 500 years before Bintoni. Jirrham Bintoni lived 165 years before the prophet Mohammed.

*Itrasshapai Santul*  
*Bikramaitul phehalameen Karimun*  
*Bihillahaya Samiminela*  
*Motakabbenaran Bihillaha*  
*Yubee quaid min howa*  
*Yaphakharu phajgal asari*

*Nahans Osirim Bayjayholeen  
Yaha sabdunya Kanateph natephi  
Bijihalin Atadari Bilala masaurateen  
PhakefTasabahu. Kaunni eja majakaralhada  
Walhada Achimiman, burukan, Kad, Toluho  
Wastastaru Bihillaha yakajibainana  
Baleykulle amarena  
Phaheya jaunabil amaray Bikramatoon  
--Sair-ul-Okul, page 315*

Fortunate are those who were born  
During King Vikram's reign, he was  
A noble generous, dutiful ruler devoted  
To the welfare of his subjects. But  
At that time, we Arabs oblivious of divinity  
Were lost in sensual pleasures. Plotting  
And torture were rampant. The darkness of  
Ignorance had enveloped our country.  
Like the lamb struggling for its life  
In the cruel jaws of a wolf, we Arabs  
Were gripped by ignorance. The whole  
Country was enveloped in a darkness as  
Intense as on a new moon night. But the  
Present dawn and pleasant sunshine of  
Education is the result of the favor of  
That noble King Vikram whose benevolence  
Did not lose sight of us foreigners as we  
Were. He spread his sacred culture amongst  
Us and sent scholars from his own land  
Whose brilliance shown like that of the sun  
In our country. These scholars and preceptors  
Through whose benevolence we were once again  
Made aware of the presence of God, introduced  
To his secret knowledge and put on the road to

Truth, had come to our country to initiate us  
In that culture and impart education.

Thus it is obvious that the Vedic religion was present in pre-Islamic Arabia as early as 1850 B.C.

### Islam Still Contains the Influence of the Pre-Muslim Vedic Culture

The name of God in the Muslim religion is Allah. In Sanskrit the name Allah refers to the Mother Goddess, as found in the names of Amba, Amma, Akka, and others. There exists a minor Upanishad called the *Allopanishad*, proving the Vedic link with the name Allah.

Islam means submission and surrender in Arabic.

Koran comes from the Arabic word *Kara*, which means to read. *Kara* in Sanskrit means hand or helping hand that takes you to God.

In Sanskrit the term *Shah* connotes “shining.” A person of royal descent shines because of his wealth, status, power, and personality. The title Badshah or Shahenshah are drawn from the term *Shah*.

Om Shanti—Salaam: Muslims generally greet each other using “*Salaam*” which means peace. In Sanskrit, “*Shanti*” means peace and the greeting is often “*Om Shanti*.”

### The Prophet Mohammed and His Appearance in Vedic Literature

The Vedic text Bhavishya Purana (Parva 3, Khand 3, Adya 3, texts 5-6) predicts the appearance of Mohammed. Therein it states: “An illiterate teacher will appear, Mohammed is his name, and he will give religion to the people of the desert.”

Mohammed’s family name was Kureshi, which is Sanskrit signifying they were from a branch of the Indian Kuru dynasty that once ruled India. It is also known that Mohammed’s uncle Umar bin-e Hassham and family were engaged in making temple deities.

The *Encyclopedia Islamia* explains that Mohammed’s grandfather and uncles were hereditary priests of the Kaaba temple, which housed 360 deities. Mohammed destroyed most of the deities in the Kaaba except for



the central object of worship in the Kaaba, which is a black stone. Shiva worship was once prevalent amongst the Arabs. Mohammed's uncle Umar bin-e Hassham, who was practicing Vedic rituals and a devotee of Lord Shiva, was a renowned poet and wrote many verses in praise of Shiva. One of these has survived on page 235 of Sair-Ul-Okul and reads as follows:

*Kafavomal fikra min ulumin Tab asayru  
Kaluwan amataul Hawa was Tajakhru  
We Tajakhayroba udan Kalalwade-E Liboawa  
Walukayanay jatally, hay Yamuna Tab asayru  
Wa Abalolha ajabu armeeman Mahadeva  
Manojail ilamuddin minhum wa sayattaru  
Wa Sahabi Kay-yam feema-Kamil Minday Yauman  
Wa Yakulum no latabahan foeennak Tawjjaru  
Massayaray akhalakan hasanan Kullahum  
Najumum aja—at Summa gabuk Hindu*

The man who may spend his life in sin  
And irreligion or waste it in lechery and wrath  
If at least he relent and return to  
Righteousness can he be saved?  
If but once he worship Mahadeva with a pure heart,  
He will attain the ultimate in spirituality.  
Oh Lord Shiva exchange my entire life for  
But a day's sojourn in India where one attains salvation.  
But one pilgrimage there secures for one all  
Merit and company of the truly great.

Mohammed is very close to *Mahamod* in Sanskrit meaning great joy or *Mahan Madah* meaning “man of great pride.” It is interesting to know that Mohammed, who was the most humble prophet, could also be called “the man of great pride,” for a devotee always takes pride in the glory of God.

Thousands of words that were derived from Sanskrit still survive in Arabic today. Here are some examples:

Sanskrit—Arabic—English

Sagwan—Saj—Teakwood

Vish—Besh—Poison

Anusari—Ansari—Follower

Shishya—Sheikh—Disciple

Mrityu—Mout—Death

Pra-Ga-ambar—Paigambar—One from heaven

Maleen—Malaun—Dirty or soiled

Aapati—Aafat—Misfortune

Karpas—Kaifas—Cotton

Karpur—Kafur—Camphor

Pramukh—Barmak—Chief

Utsav—Urs—Festival

Following are some of the Vedic deities and their original Sanskrit names:

Arabic—Sanskrit—English

Al-Dsaizan—Shani—Saturn

Al-Ozi or Ozza—Oorja—Divine energy

Al-Sharak—Shukra—Venus

Aud—Uddhav—

Bag—Bhagwan—God

Bajar—Vajra—Indra's thunderbolt

Kabar—Kuber—God of wealth

Dar—Indra—King of gods

Dua Shara—Deveshwar—Lord of the gods

Habal—Bahubali—Lord of strength

Madan—Madan—God of love

Manaph—Manu—First man

Manat—Manath—My Lord

Obodes—Bhoodev—Earth

Razeah—Rajesh—King of king  
Saad—Siddhi—God of luck  
Sair—Shree—Goddess of wealth  
Sawara—Shiva-Eshwar—God Shiva  
Yauk—Yaksha—Divine being  
Wad—Budh—Mercury

The Sufi saint Baba Bulleshah in a couplet of his Faaki in Punjabi says:

*Hor lakh upav na such hovi, puch dekh seeavne jug saare*  
*Sukh roop akhand Chaitanya hai tu*  
*Bulleshah pukarde Ved pyaare*

You may do a million things to find happiness  
And you may ask the wise people of the world  
You are the blissful Chaitanya....  
So say the Vedas.

It is unfortunate that the Hindus have forgotten that all Muslims are their brothers and sisters; only their ways of worship are different. The Muslims, in turn, have completely forgotten that their forefathers were Hindus once upon a time, so they have every right to the Vedic culture. Even Afghanistan and Arabia were Hindu once upon a time.

The Muslims in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan should not disown Hindu traditions. Their forefathers have had Hindu names, so the Hindus and the Muslims are from the same family and must respect each other. Muslims in India will have to take pride in Hindu philosophy and culture.

**The following speech was delivered by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar at the UN  
World Peace Summit, New York, August 28, 2000:**

Often, people who take responsibility do not pray, and those who pray do not take responsibility. It is interesting that this hall which takes the responsibility for the entire world has seen a lot of prayers today. And this is what is the need of the hour.

Every religion has three aspects: values, symbols, and practices. There is diversity in practices and in symbols, whereas values are common in all the religions. The growing fanaticism, fundamentalism, and intolerance in the world is because people are stuck with only the practices, symbols, or customs. They are forgetting the values, the human values, and it is very touching to see all the spiritual leaders from all the communities come together here to foster human values.

Spirit loves diversity. There is not just one type of fruit, or only one type of people, or one type of animal in this world. Spirit loves diversity so let's not confine the spirit to a uniform. Let's enjoy the diverse variety of creation by honoring them all, respecting and really loving. We used to say religious tolerance. I think that these words have become obsolete now. You tolerate only that which you don't love. Don't you think so? Time has come to leave each other's religions as one's own. Religion is great not just because it is mine; it is great because of what it is. This understanding in all the priests and clergymen and those who lead people in spiritual and religious light will put an end to fanaticism and fundamentalism going on in this, our beautiful world.

It will be very nice if, together, we all adopt a resolution that we educate our people a little bit from every religion, to have a broader vision about life. No doubt, one must go deep in one's own religion, but at the same time, having an understanding about every religion is essential today. We all need to work towards that. We pray and see the divinity within us, for without prayer and meditation, which are the spiritual aspects of life, religion becomes just a dry skin. I often say, religion is the

banana skin and spirituality is the banana. The misery in the world is because we throw away the banana, and we are holding on to the dry skin. So we need to induce the spiritual aspect of our life.

See love inside you and that is meditation; and see God in the person next to you and that is serving. The service and self-referral aspects of meditation go hand in hand. This is a wonderful occasion for all those leaders of society who are concerned about terrorism and fundamentalism to look back to where we have made a mistake. What is it that is lacking in the society? How can we enrich the human values without which this earth cannot be sustained?

The previous century has been an era of uniforms and unions. Now let us move to an era of communion.

With these few words I pray and I take responsibility, both at the same time.

***“Spirit loves diversity. There is not just one type of fruit, or only one type of people, or one type of animal in this world. Let’s enjoy the diverse variety of creation by honoring them all, respecting and really loving.”***